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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a classroom-based research project that examined the impact of strategy training on listening performance. Participants were 46 students enrolled in the preparatory year of the English Language Education Department of Trakya University, Turkey. Students were divided into an experimental and a control group, and their learning style preferences and listening strategies were determined. Students showed failure in prediction, in timing, in elaboration or retrieval, and in use of cover strategies, so the intervention provided cognitive and metacognitive strategies in those areas. Both groups worked with a textbook that included some strategy training 4 hours per week, and they also completed 3 hours of a language development course. In the language development course, experimental students underwent a conscious cognitive strategy training process that used audiotapes and videotapes selected from authentic materials presented by the BBC. Pretests and posttests examined various types of listening tasks. Results showed no significant performance differences between the two groups at pretest, but a positive difference was evident at posttest (the experimental group showed improvement in listening performance). (SM)

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TITLE :

AWARENESS RAISING ON LEARNER'S LISTENING STRATEGIES AND ITS IMPACT ON THE LISTENING PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT This paper is a report of classroom- based research on the impact of strategy training on listening performance. The subjects were 46 students enrolled in the preparatory year of the English Language Education Department of the University. They were divided into two groups(experimental and control). The pretest administered at the beginning of the academic year showed no significant performance difference between the two groups of subjects. But the posttest displayed a positive difference. The experimental group who went through strategy training showed improvement in performance. The Hypothesis that training on how to make use of one's own listening strategies will result in a successful performance in the listening section of the English Proficiency Exam was confirmed.

FL 027 161

INTRODUCTION

The research on second / foreign language listening has focused on listening as one of the skills to be mastered, but the research on listening strategies seems to be limited. Scholars who have conducted research on listening strategies agree on the positive impact of stratagy training on listening performance. The hypothesis that systematic instruction in the use of strategies improves listening comprehension, has been proved (Thompson & Rubin,1996). However, individuals use different listening strategies. Learners' individual characteristics and their learning styles need to be taken into consideration in the study of the use of listening strategies. It is believed (Oxford 1993,Cohen & Chi 2000) to be a good idea to diagnose the characteristics and learning styles of the learners in order to raise awareness on their own learning style preferences and strategy use which in turn helps them to handle the tasks more easily. Raising awareness on the language learning strategies in general is considered to be useful to improve students' attitudes, motivation and beliefs about language learning (Oxford, 1990). But, how much awareness should learners have and what type of strategy instruction (explicit or implicit) should be done, need to be determined (Flaitz & Feyton, 1996). Therefore, for this study the students' learning style preferences and their listening strategies were diagnosed first, then it was decided that both explicit and implicit strategy training instruction would be essential for a period of two academic terms. The main query was focused on whether strategy training

could be of any help to the ELT students in their achievements in the listening section of the final English proficiency exam. The research question was developed as follows:

Does strategy training on listening lead to a better performance in the listening section of the final English Proficiency Exam?

It is difficult to understand and assess the EFL students' listening skills. However it is not that difficult to see the problems they encounter in listening classes.Many factors are relevant to their success or failure. Some of those factors could be listed as L2 proficiency in general, L2 listening ability in particular, background knowledge, listeners' memory and attention, their ability to interpret, to predict and finally their ability to implement strategies. Our subjects had problems in almost all of these which resulted with failure in the exams.Thus , It was hypothesized for this study that students could be more successful in the listening section of the final exam if they were trained on how to make use of their own listening strategies.

Listening strategies have been grouped as: planning, monitoring and evaluation (metacognitive strategies); inferencing, elaboration, summarization, translation, transfer, repetition, resourcing, grouping, note-taking, deduction / induction and substitution (cognitive strategies); and questionning for clarification, cooperation, lowering anxiety and self- encouragement (social/Affective strategies).

Learner strategies in general, on the other hand, have been described by scholars in different ways and they can be grouped as : Cognitive, Metacognitive, and

Social/ Affective (Chamot and O'Maley 1990) Direct and Indirect strategies (Oxford 1990), Language Use Strategies and Language learning Strategies (Cohen 1998). As it can be seen from the catagorization given above, both listening strategies and learner strategies in general are grouped as cognitive, metacognitive and social /affective strategies.

In cognitive theory, learners are mentally active and use strategies like; selecting from the incoming information what they wish to remember, relating it to their prior knowledge, storing the selected information in memory, and using various procedures for remembering it when needed (O'Malley and Chamot,1990). Metacognitive strategies are executive processes associated with the regulation and management of learning. And, Social/ affective strategies assist students in learning interactive communicative skills (Mendelsohn & Rubin, 1995 : 15-16).

Cohen and Chi (2000) have combined them (Cognitive, Metacognitive and Social/Affective strategies) all together in their Language Strategy Use Survey (LSU) and they have prepared the survey according to language skills. Therefore, for this study Cohen and Chi's LSU Survey was seen to be appropriate for adaptation.

In addition, Oxford's (1990) Style Analysis Survey was adopted for learning style preferences which were also considered to be important for a better understanding of the subjects' learning styles.

RESEARCH DESIGN

For a better validity and reliability of the study, the two major contrasting research paradigms -qualitative and quantitative – were both used and for the research type an Action Research was seen to be appropriate because of its practical nature.

Research Question:

Does strategy training on listening lead to a better performance in the listening section of the final English Proficiency Exam?

Participants:

Our subjects (46 students) were the students who enrolled preparatory classes of the ELT Department of the University for the academic year 2000-2001. They were divided into two groups (Control and experimental) randomly. The pretest administered at the beginning of the academic year showed no significant performance difference between the two groups of subjects.

Materials and methods :

The students were informed about being subjects of an experiment intended to improve their listening skills. Both groups did listening course 4 hours a week where they followed a text book which provided some strategy training. In addition both groups did 3 hours of Language Development Course per week where no specific text book was used. In the Language Development Course, the experimental group underwent a conscious strategy training process. Video and audio casettes were used

as input. The maximum length of the listening tasks was 30 minutes. The materials were selected from various authentic materials prepared by BBC.

The level of proficiency in English was determined to be Cambridge Advanced English (CAE) level. Therefore, a mock CAE proficiency test was chosen to be administered as pre and post tests. In line with the pre and posttests tasks , four types of listening tasks - note-taking, gap filling , true /false and matching - were designed to be used in class with the experimental group.

The test was composed of 4 sections (sub tests). In section A, the students were asked to listen and find the answers to the questions they saw on the exam paper. The answers were one or two words, not too long. Section B was a gap filling task and the students were asked to take one or two word notes while listening. Section C was a true/ false type question . Section D was a matching type and was composed of two tasks which required matching the extracts they heard with the words given.All the tasks required information retrieval and note-taking strategies.

Strategy training was carried out explicitly according to the requirements of the tasks in the test. Task 1 in section A necessitated using cognitive strategies like predicting and listening for redundancies.. Predicting content (based on visual clues / questions), focusing on relationships and key words (e.g. people-report), or listening to the repeated words and phrases (e.g. if, what if etc.) were the type of strategies expected to be used. The use of metacocnitive strategies like defining goals or monitoring, in other words, deciding what exactly to listen for or identifying sources of difficulty,

isolating problematic portions (leaving some to be answered in second listening) could also assist subjects in giving correct answers. Task 2 in section B required the use of cognitive strategies like predicting according to the key words and listening to the repeated or stressed words. It also required the use of metacognitive strategy of deciding exactly what to listen for. Task 3 in section C necessitated the use of cognitive strategy of resourcing according to the context. Task 4 and 5 in section D required the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies stated for task 1. The subjects were trained on how to make use of the listening strategies stated above to be able to find the correct answer in the test.

Subjects' Listening Problems:

The subjects showed failure in prediction, in timing (could not catch up and were stuck) , in elaboration or retrieval, and in the use of cover strategies. Therefore, they needed training on the strategies stated below.

Strategies Taught:

Cognitive Strategies covered in the training included ; predicting, listening to the known, listening to the intonation and resourcing . Metacognitive strategies covered were; defining goals, monitoring and evaluating . Some social/ affective strategies (cover strategies) were also included in training. Prediction activity can be given as an example to examplify strategy training done for this study.The subjects were given strategy questions before they were exposed to the actual task of listening. They

answered the questions and the answers were shared with the whole group (See Appendix). For the strategy training on evaluating , the subjects were asked to evaluate their performance right after each task. The strategy training was done in both oral and written forms.

RESULTS

1-Pre and Posttest results:

The pretest administered at the beginning of the academic year showed no significant performance difference between the two groups of subjects. But the posttest showed a positive difference and the experimental group who went through strategy training showed improvement in performance. (See table 1 and Table 2)

T- Test results:

a- Paired Sample Test :	t= -11,79	n=23	p< . 05
b- Independent Samples Test :	t= 3.22	n= 23	p< . 05

2-Analysis of subtests (pre and posttest tasks):

In the pretest, the subjects scored the least in the fifth task which required the use of cognitive strategies like inferencing and elaboration. They scored best in the second task which required the use of the cognitive strategy of resourcing according to the context. Posttest results showed a big difference with the pretest results. The improvement observed was due to strategy training. (See table 3)

3-The relationship between learning styles and the results of subtests of the pre and posttests:

In all the subtests; the subjects with audio-visual, extraverted, intuitive, closure-oriented and global learning styles scored better compared with the subjects with hands-on, introverted, concrete-sequential, open and analytic learning styles (see pie charts 1 and 2). There was no significant difference.

4-Qualitative analysis of learning styles and listening strategies:

Through an examination of subjects' learning style preference scores, it was seen that 10 out of 23 subjects had a preference for visual, 3 subjects for auditory and 4 subjects for both visual and auditory preferences. Only 5 subjects were diagnosed to have hands-on learning style preferences.

When it comes to the subjects' personality styles; 17 subjects were extraverted and 6 were intraverted. More subjects were found to be intuitive (19) than concrete-sequential (4) and subjects with closure-oriented style were more (18) than the ones with open styles (5), and cognitively, more subjects reported being global (17) than analytic (6).

With regard to the subjects' use of listening strategies as reported on the listening strategy survey(Cohen & Chi , 2000); cognitive strategies like elaboration (23 subjects) and inferencing (20 subjects), and metacognitive strategies like auditory monitoring (20 subjects), planning and organisation (17 subjects) are diagnosed to be

used more. The strategy used the least was reported to be note-taking (9 subjects) (see Table 4).

When the results of Cohen & Chi's Listening Strategy use survey (2000) and Oxford's Learning Style Preferences survey (1993), similar strategies like planning and organization (12 out of 17) and elaboration and inferencing (13 out of 17) are diagnosed to be used by the subjects with audio-visual and global styles (17 subjects) . But no correlation is found between the subjects' learning style preferences and listening strategies.

DISCUSSION

The t-test results provides confirmation that listening strategy training resulted in improved performance on the final English Proficiency Exam's listening section. However, it should be noted that there were some other factors which influenced the results. Both experimental and control groups had 30 hours of English language instruction per week which included reading, writing, use of English and speaking along with the listening classes. The improvement in the students' general knowledge of English might also have an impact on the listening proficiency results.

In the comparison of pre and post listening test results, it was recognised that in section three for questions 21-22-23, the subjects did better in the pretest and showed no improvement,on the contrary they scored less. These were the True/ False questions and they required the use of cognitive strategy of listening to the key words and the use of the metacognitive strategy in deciding what exactly to listen for. After

training, the subjects might have had more confidence and might have been mistaken in their choice.

Learners with audio-visual learning style naturally did better than the ones with hands-on learning styles. This was something expected but the subjects with analytic learning style were also expected to be successful listeners. Because it was assumed that the analytic style would lead to listen for specific words which would form the answers to the questions. The question types in the listening exam appealed both to the analytic and the global learning styles. But, the subjects with global learning style scored better.

CONCLUSION

This study used one experimental and one control teacher with a text book to follow in the classrooms and two research assistants to do the Language Development Course. One of the Language Development Courses is used for listening only where extra strategy training with specially designed classroom activities is conducted. One dependent measure (Listening Post Test) showed a significant advantage of the experimental over the control group. Qualitative analysis of Learning Style Preferences and Listening Strategies did not display a significant relationship.

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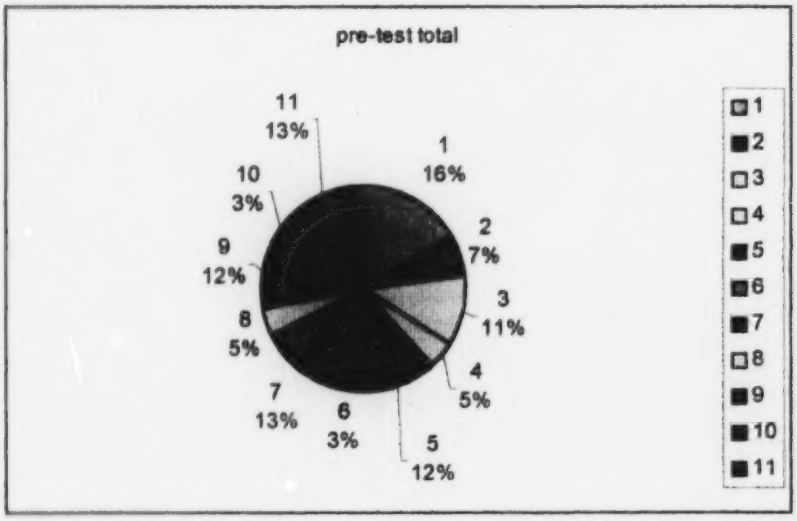
Pie- chart 1



Pie-Chart 2

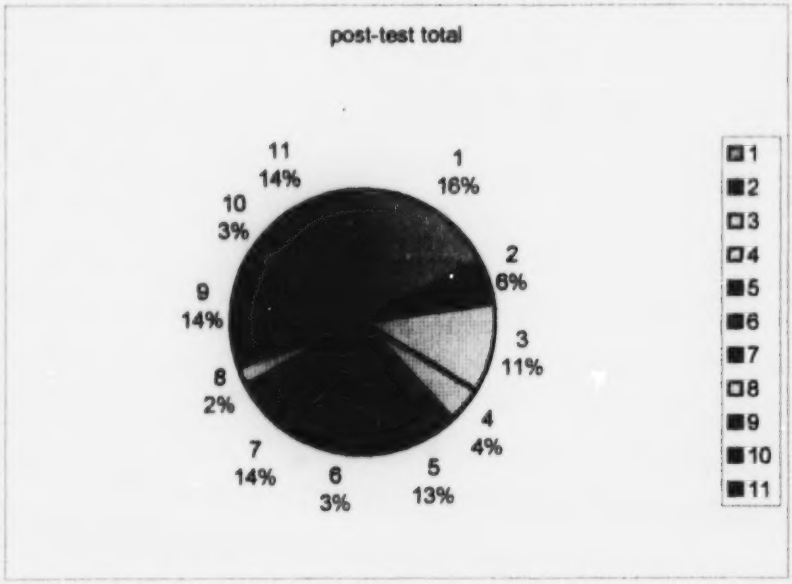


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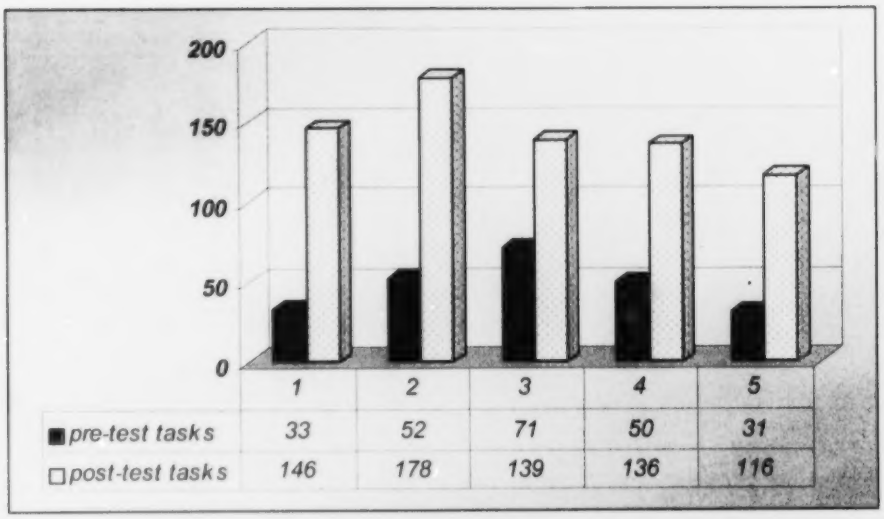
Table 1



	1	2	3	4	5
pre-test tasks	33	52	71	50	31
post-test tasks	146	178	139	136	116

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